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ABSTRACT

In 1989, President George Bush met with the nation's governors and the foundation was laid for the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act" (signed into law March 1994). The act provides funds to underwrite states' development and implementation of content and performance standards and associated assessment methodologies directed toward helping students meet nationally determined academic and occupational skill standards. The "Goals 2000" act created the National Education Standards and Improvement Council and charged it with the responsibility to examine and certify voluntary national and state content, student performance, opportunity-to-learn standards and assessment systems voluntarily provided by states and content groups. Postsecondary speech communication administrators are in a position to assist their respective campuses in proactively meeting the charges of "Goals 2000" and SCANS (which stands for the Labor Secretary's "Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills") and, additionally, aid in the preparation of competitive subgrant proposals. A case might easily be made for requiring three communication courses across the undergraduate core curriculum: public speaking (taught from a critical thinking perspective), interpersonal communication, and group discussion (with an emphasis on problem solving and, to some degree, conflict resolution). Goals 2000 and SCANS provide speech communication administrators with compelling legislative and rhetorical support for the broad expansion of communication instruction requirements across the undergraduate core curriculum. (TB)

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Abstract

SCANS and the "Goals 2,000: Educate America Act"--External Validation for Expanding Communication Instruction Across the Undergraduate Core Curriculum

Since 1989, two presidents, the nation's governors, the United States Congress, the Departments of Education and Labor, and various state legislatures have provided speech communication administrators with compelling legislative and rhetorical support for the broad expansion of communication instruction requirements across the undergraduate core curriculum.

In 1989, President Bush met with the nation's governors (including then-Governor Bill Clinton) and the foundation was laid for the "Goals 2,000: Educate America Act" (signed into law March 31, 1994). The act provides funds to underwrite states' development and implementation of content and performance standards and associated assessment methodologies directed towards helping students meet nationally determined academic and occupational skill standards.

The intent underlying "Goals 2,000..." is that by the year 2,000 all American students will demonstrate competency in a variety of challenging academic contexts. The National Council on Education Standards and Testing (established by Congress) recommended the development of education standards that will provide direction for voluntary compliance by the states. The "'Goals 2,000...Act' authorized $400 million during FY94 and such sums through 1998 for grants to states to develop and implement plans for system wide education reform"(*SPECTRA*, October 1994, p. 3). Additional funds were requested to provide support for the Department of Labor's National Skill Standards Board. State educational agencies with competitive grant proposals will be able to provide local subgrants (to educational and community consortia, individual schools, agencies, etc.) for related activities such as professional development, education preservice programs, opportunity-to-learn programs (e.g., distance education), etc.

As part of "Goals 2,000..." the National Education Goals Panel was established to review and promote voluntarily submitted national content, student performance, and opportunity to learn standards. On July 27, 1993 resolutions of the panel regarding "Assessing the National Goal Relating to Postsecondary Education--Goal Five" were adopted. Goal Five states that "by the year 2,000 every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy... The National Education Goals Panel believes that it is both feasible and desirable to develop a national sample-based postsecondary assessment system, that will provide regular national and comparable state indicators of college graduates ability to ***think critically,***

communicate effectively and solve problems... In assessing students' abilities to think critically, communicate effectively and solve problems, ***the system should be designed to reflect students' differing fields of study and occupational areas."***

The "Goals 2,000..." act created and charged the National Education Standards and Improvement Council to examine and certify voluntary national and state content, student performance, opportunity-to-learn standards and assessment systems voluntarily provided by states and content groups. The act calls for the generation of strategies for ensuring that all educational agencies and state schools participate in developing and implementing needed improvements.

The United States Department of Labor correspondingly created and charged the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) to examine "what work requires of schools." The commission identified five competency areas that today's students must be proficient in to successfully enter the competitive global work environment: resources, *interpersonal*, information, systems, technology (1991, p. 26). "A SCANS Report for America 2,000..." (1991) detailed that "tomorrow's worker will have to **listen** and **speak** well enough to **explain schedules and procedures, communicate with customers, work in teams, understand customer concerns, describe complex systems and procedures, probe for hidden meanings, teach others, and solve problems**" (p. 27). Some specific communication competencies further elaborated in the SCANS report included: **"...communicates with clients and customers to satisfy their expectations; communicates thoughts, feelings, and ideas to justify a position, encourages, persuades, convinces, or other-wise motivates an individual or groups...; works towards an agreement that may involve exchanging specific resources or resolving divergent interests; works well with women**

and men with a variety of ethnic, social, or educational backgrounds; ...contributes ideas, suggestions and effort to groups" (p. B-1).

Postsecondary speech communication administrators are in a position to assist their respective campuses in proactively meeting the charges of "Goals 2,000" and SCANS and, additionally, aid in the preparation of competitive subgrant proposals (e.g., for acquisition of professional development funds, etc.). In order to meet the National Educational Goals Panel adopted resolutions (i.e., college graduates should be able to **think critically, communicate effectively, and solve problems**--regardless of differing fields of study and occupational areas) and the SCANS charge (i.e., tomorrows worker will have to **listen** and **speak** well) a case can easily be made for requiring three communication courses across the undergraduate core curriculum: public speaking (taught from a critical thinking perspective), interpersonal communication, and group discussion (with an emphasis on problem-solving and, to some degree, conflict resolution). A six credit hour two course sequence may also be recommended involving public speaking and a combination of interpersonal communication and group discussion. A single three credit hour hybrid course offering a combination of the three content areas seems insufficient to meet the broad-based "Goals 2,000..." and SCANS charges.

The six regional accrediting associations (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools, Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, New England Association of Schools and Colleges) will most likely be substantively influenced by the voluntary compliance of individual institutions to the "Goals 2,000..." and SCANS charges. Campuses proactively addressing these charges will "get in on the ground floor" of what will soon be regarded as the current "national trend."

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools already stipulates that each institution "**must** demonstrate that its graduates are competent in reading, writing, *oral*

communication, fundamental mathematical skills..." (The 1995 Edition of the Criteria for Accreditation, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools--Transition Document, p. 13). "Case building for the communication general education core requirement finds additional support in the accreditation handbooks of the North Central, Western, New England, and Northwest Associations [e.g., the 1994-95 North Central handbook details that college-level experiences should engender competencies in speaking, listening, critical thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, and interpersonal skills (see pp. 21, 22); the 1991 Western Association handbook stipulates that undergraduate studies ensure competence in oral communication and argument (see 4.B.2)]" (Hemenway, 1994, pp. 1-9).

The speech communication field has been actively involved in developing a national assessment agenda and corresponding communication skills assessment instruments and methodologies since the mid-1970s. The SCA Task Force on Assessment and Testing which later became the Committee on Assessment and Testing (1980) has actively engaged in "gathering, analyzing and disseminating information about the testing of speech communication skills" (see Backlund & Morreale, 1994). Field assessment activity has encompassed: the definition of communication skills and competency; the provision of published summaries of assessment procedures and instruments; the provision of published standards for effective oral communication programs; the development of guidelines for program review; etc. (see Backlund & Morreale, 1994). The development and use of a wide variety of assessment instruments (e.g., PRPSA [Personal Report of Public Speaking Apprehension], PRCA [Personal Report of Communication Apprehension], WTC Scale [Willingness-to-Communicate Scale], CCAI [Communication Competencey Assessment Instrument], Brown-Carlsen Listening Comprehension Test, Watson-Barker Listening Test, Kentucky Comprehensive Listening Test, I ACCESS Test [Intercultural Assessment of Communication Competency & English Speaking Skills], CSRS [Conversational Skills Rating Scale], The Competent Speaker--Speech Evaluation Form, CBI [Communication

Behaviors Instrument], etc.) has allowed speech communication professionals to move well beyond "paper and pencil" tests of student cognitive learning and acquire substantive assessments of student affective and behavioral learning.

The national charges of "Goals 2,000" and SCANS provide speech communication administrators with compelling legislative and rhetorical support for the broad expansion of communication instruction requirements across the undergraduate core curriculum. The field's activity over the last two decades regarding the assessment of cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning associated with human communication instruction leaves speech communication professioals well positioned to meet the externally generated broad-based goals and resolutions detailed above.

References and Notes

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Roy Berko and Megan Brooks for their provision of SCA's "Goals 2,000..." and SCANS related resources.

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